Walking away from my PhD was no easy decision. I invested years of my life into becoming a research scientist and overcame many obstacles to make it through the first three years of the Biological Sciences program. A massive part of my decision to leave the University at Buffalo was seeing the inner workings of this university, especially the impunity of tenured research faculty and lack of respect for teaching faculty and new research faculty, as well as the suppression of free speech, collusion with police to inflict brutal treatment on students, and poor protections for underrepresented minority students. It made me rethink my desire to participate in the higher education system as a whole, at least in its current form and ultimately led to my decision to leave the university.

I did research in two areas while at UB–the first was Hawaiian anchialine pools' *Halocaridina rubra*, or ʻōpaeʻula, and the algal communities these tiny red shrimp subsisted on with the late Dr. Scott Santos, and the second was the chemical composition of egg pigments in tinamous, an order of birds found mainly in the Amazon Rainforest with Dr. Silu Wang. Both the Hawaiian coastline and the Amazon have had their ecologies dramatically reshaped by human activity–specifically profit-motivated destruction of habitats by tourism, resource extraction, and fossil-fuel induced climate change. Before coming to UB, I earned a degree in biochemistry and molecular biology and global health from Rollins College, a liberal arts school where the faculty instilled in me the importance of scholar activism. I was trained to connect my research to real-world problems, to offer context and critical discussion of the forces shaping our world. When it came time for me to give my first presentation on my research plan, I wrote my acknowledgements to include land acknowledgement and a statement about the University at Buffalo's unwillingness to consider divesting from funds that were linked to Israel's genocidal actions in Gaza, including funds benefiting Hyundai and Caterpillar, companies that been implicated in supplying machinery for the demolition of both Palestinian homes in the occupied West Bank and illegal mining in the Amazon rainforest. I had three students come up to me after the presentation and thank me for calling attention to these issues, who said they wished they could do the same but feared reprimand or retaliation from faculty. Their concerns were founded–the next day I received this email from the faculty member running the course:

"For the future, leave out your personal beliefs and activist messages from your scientific presentations or course settings. As I pointed out in our very first class, we solely focus our attention on science aspects in these presentations and not our opinions on political matters or current events. Your message seemed irrelevant to the research and the discussion should be taken elsewhere."

I explained in a response that I understood that the faculty member and some of my peers did not believe we should discuss political matters in our role as scientists; that it was their right to choose not to speak about these things; that my choice to speak about the ways our university participates in upholding systemic violence could make me appear less likable and, to some, less professional than my peers; and that I was willing to live with those consequences.

Genocide is an uncomfortable topic, and I understand that it would be more comfortable to not consider our role in upholding that level of violence. However, I also believe as academics we

strengthen our institutions when we apply the same rigorous criticism we are trained to levy in our work to the structures that enable us to pursue our research, sometimes at the expense of other people's lives. It became clear to me in the months following my presentation that this was not how I would be trained at UB, nor would the university stop procuring funding from sources that were gaining from genocide and ecocide. Just a few months later, UB violently arrested my friends and comrades at a peaceful protest of the University's complicity in genocide on the field next to the building I worked in. Every time I walked to my lab, I was flooded with memories of Zionist students jeering as people I knew were being slammed to the pavement, police forcibly removing a student's hijab, and the screams of students being chased by cops into parking lots. I could not in good conscience continue working for an institution that thought this was an acceptable way to respond to civil unrest. I resigned with my Masters degree at the end of the following semester to find work elsewhere, and I'm not the only one. Heather Squire, a former Environment and Sustainability PhD student, inspired this public statement and left the university for similar reasons. I am sure there are many more of us, researchers who could not stomach participating in this system any longer, and I hope they will speak up too. I hope for a day when we will have nothing to share other than sincere, unequivocal gratitude to the university that funds our research. I hope the university will develop ways to support the critical work of protecting vulnerable ecosystems beyond investing in the very entities that threaten them. Saorsie don Phalastíne.

Jozef O'Malley (M.S. '25)

https://bdsmovement.net/Act-Now-Against-These-Companies-Profiting-From-Genocide
http://reporterbrasil.org.br/2024/06/hyundai-caterpillar-lead-ranking-backhoes-illegal-mining-operations/